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PCB-Loaded 'Dead Creek' Sealed Off

By Jeff Stroud
Of the Post-Dispatch Staff

Illinois officials today sealed off an area around "Dead Creek" in Sauget and Cahokia after tests showed high concentrations of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), phosphorus and a variety of heavy metals in the ditch.

"We're worried about kids and curious people" who might be injured by coming in contact with hazardous substances dumped there, said Jeff Langley of the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency's Emergency Response Unit. Snow fencing was to be erected around the creek today.

The Emergency Response Unit has given top priority to quarantining a section of Dead Creek, half a mile long by 20 feet wide, that runs from Queeny Avenue in Sauget to Judith Lane in Cahokia. A blocked culvert apparently had kept the chemicals from seeping

south of Judith. The ditch runs south from Judith through a residential area and eventually empties into the Mississippi River.

Langley said residents are most threatened by direct contact with materials in the creek. Fumes apparently are not dangerous, and there is no evidence of contamination of the water supply. The water will be tested, however.

But Cahokia residents and officials are wondering why the agency has not done something before to protect them from dangerous chemicals that apparently were dumped illegally in the ditch.

One resident's dog was killed over the Memorial Day weekend after it rolled in the muck. Although the dog was hoisted down after rolling in the ditch, its body was dissolved in the base the next day.

Cahokia Health Officer Tonia Townsend said state EPA officials took samples from the ditch in early May after he reported a large area of the ditch was on fire. "I'm glad now that they've taken the time to find out what it is," said Townsend. "But what took them so long?"

Townsend said that on May 2, an area about 5 feet long and 15 feet wide, 200 yards north of Judith, was smoking as if the soil was burning. He first pointed "Keep Out" signs after children were observed riding motorcycles in the creek. The smoking has continued intermittently throughout the summer.

Townsend said his own efforts to keep children out of the ditch have been unsuccessful. "Keep Out" signs have been torn down almost as fast as he could put them up. Townsend replaced them and put a snow fence across the culvert at Judith on Friday. Townsend

said the Cahokia Fire Department has doused the area near Judith repeatedly with water, to no avail.

A state EPA spokesman, John Muraro, said a backlog of laboratory work and a broken piece of equipment delayed analysis of the samples taken in May, but the equipment was recently repaired, and an analysis of samples taken last week showed concentrations of PCBs as high as 5,200 parts per million 50 yards south of Queeny and 120 parts per million 40 yards north of Judith.

Muraro said a phosphorus concentration of 120,000 parts per million could explain the smoking phenomenon. Phosphorus becomes highly reactive at 56 degrees Fahrenheit. He said the material

lowing ditch contains PCBs

CAHOKIA, Ill. (UPI) — High concentrations of toxic PCBs and heavy metals have been found in "Dead Creek," a ditch long complained of by residents that it frequently smolders and gives off a fishy glow at night.

Langley of the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency's emergency response unit said Monday samples last week showed concentrations of PCBs of 5,200 parts per million and concentrations of at least 100 parts per million of heavy metals.

They have been shown in laboratory tests to cause cancer in animals and are suspected of causing cancer in humans.

They also may have been dumped at the site, said, but tests did not show what kinds they may be.

It is clearly evident that this is a case of a lot of waste dumping in the area," Langley said.

The ditch, which runs past industrial sections of Cahokia, is south of an industrial area that includes the Cerro Copper, and several other industrial complexes driven from St. Louis.

It is the only source of PCBs, which is most commonly in the area. Monsanto is making the substance since 1977 when health officials discovered it.

Officials can state no connection between Monsanto plant and dump at Cahokia.

A spokesman at Monsanto in St. Louis

"We incinerated all the PCB waste from all operations from 1971 to 1977, when we shut our PCB production unit down. It's pretty much common knowledge that the source of most of the problems resulted from illegal disposal operations over the last several years."

IEPA spokesman John Muraro said state agencies are trying to establish liability in the matter.

Langley said the waste had been dumped in bulk at the site rather than in barrels. He said apparently someone took waste from industrial sites and dumped it there, perhaps as long as 12 years ago.

The problem came to public attention two weeks ago when Peter Lauman of Cahokia reported finding his prize show dog dead one morning, its skin eaten away by a substance in which it had rolled the night before.

Lauman said his dog had come in covered with the substance and had washed him off. But the next day its flesh had been eaten away to the bone.

"Our theory is that this ditch also was used last winter to dump white phosphorus," Muraro said.

"As the temperatures warmed up and reached 66 degrees, that's when white phosphorus will react with the air, will burn and glow and give off a dense white smoke. If this poor dog rolled in this, it's no wonder it took everything off of him."

Muraro said the agency has ordered the site sealed off, noting snow fences have been placed around the ditch and signs prohibit trespassing. He said the site had been used by motorcyclists as a popular dirt bike track.

Glowing Ditch Near Cahokia Fenced Off

CAHOKIA, Ill. (AP) — A smoldering, glowing ditch in this Southern Illinois city has been fenced off by pollution officials because it is believed to contain dangerously high levels of toxic PCBs and toxic heavy metals.

Illinois Environmental Protection Agency officials supervised the fencing Monday and said the site, near Illinois 3, is believed to have been an illegal dumping ground for toxic wastes since the early 1970s.

JEFF LANGLEY, an IEPA spokesman in Springfield, said samples taken from the ditch last week showed high levels of PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls), pesticides and 20 metals, including toxic lead, cadmium, barium, and less toxic phosphorus, potassium and strontium.

Officials said the metals account for the smoldering and burning. The site is about a mile from the Monsanto Co. chemical plant where PCBs, believed by some researchers to cause cancer, were manufactured. But company spokesmen said they have not dumped any material into the ditch.

Monsanto last made the chemicals in 1977 at the plant in Sauget, near the ditch. They were widely used as coolants in electrical transformers for years, but

finally outlawed for uses after mounting controversy over health effects.

IEPA CHEMIST James Kelly said the dump is "a very serious matter" because the poisons may be seeping into private wells.

Langley said a clean-up operation is being developed while officials attempt to determine who was liable. "We suspect it might have been a hazardous waste hauler that picked up material from industries in the area and just dumped it," he said.

He said the technology exists to clean up the site, but there is a problem of resources. "Some of the material is reactive and cannot be put in a landfill. The PCB level is above the maximum concentration allowed in a landfill."

IEPA officials were called to the site in May after a nearby resident, Peter Lauman, reported that his dog had died of chemical burns after rolling in dirt near the ditch.

ILLINOIS

PWS
ST. CLAIR

Chemical traces show up in Cahokia well

By PATRICIA SZYMCAK
Globe-Democrat Staff Writer

A test on a fourth well is pending.
IEPA officials say the chemicals found in the well

ground water and may be the source of the Dead Creek pollution.

CAHOKIA

ST. CLAIR
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State officials, Monsanto to meet

By M.J. BLACKWELL
Of the News-Democrat

The first meeting between a Sauget chemical company located near Dead Creek and state authorities is scheduled for Monday morning in Springfield.

Officials with the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency and the Illinois Attorney General's office are to meet with the Monsanto Co., an agency spokesman said. The St. Louis-based chemical company's W.G. Krummich Plant is about a mile north of the creek's mouth in Sauget.

John Muraro, IEPA public relations officer, said state officials would meet Monsanto representatives "just to discuss things in general with them since there are PCBs present. And it's part of the ongoing investigation to see if any company has any knowledge of how the chemicals got there. We're going to get around to all the industries in the area."

There are about five to six chemical companies or related industries in the vicinity of Dead Creek in Sauget.

"Obviously, because of their proximity there are companies we will be going to first," said John Renkes, supervisor of the IEPA Emergency Response Unit in a news

"It's part of the ongoing investigation to see if any company has any knowledge of how the chemicals got there. We're going to get around to all the industries in the area."

— John Muraro, IEPA public relations officer

conference Wednesday in Cahokia.

John Spano, a Monsanto spokesman, said "EPA and Monsanto have agreed to meet Monday to discuss and share samples taken in the area."

Monsanto last manufactured PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls), widely used as coolants in electrical transformers, in 1977. Spano said PCBs are non carcinogenic, IEPA officials have said. However, it is suspected of causing cancer. It is also known to affect the skin, liver and eyes.

Dead Creek, a dried up drainage ditch near Illinois 3 which has been known to suddenly start smoldering and glowing, was found to be contaminated with dangerously high levels of PCBs and 19 other toxic metals. The creek is about seven miles long and empties into the Mississippi River.

IEPA test results of soil from the creek in Sauget show PCB contamination of 1,600 to 17,000 parts per million. Near Judith Lane in Cahokia 120 parts per million were found along with a high concentration of toxic metals — barium, copper, lead, nickel, phosphorus and zinc. IEPA officials attribute the smoldering and glowing to the mixture of metals.

PCB levels above 50 ppm are considered hazardous by state and federal standards.

IEPA officials have said the chemicals found in the creek do not pose any immediate threat to area residents unless they come in direct contact with the chemicals.

The creek has been quarantined from Queeny Avenue in Sauget to Judith Lane in Cahokia. A 4-foot high snow fence has been

erected and "Keep Out" signs posted. Trespassers could be arrested.

State authorities suspect the creek has been an illegal dumping ground since the early 1970s. The state attorney general's office knows of several suspected dumpers and promises to prosecute anyone found responsible for the contamination.

The violator also would have to pay the cleanup cost, as of yet an unknown amount. But the state may have to pay the cleanup cost if a violator is not found.

Illinois Gov. James R. Thompson signed a bill Sept. 18 that would make it a Class 1 felony, punishable by one to three years in prison and double for a second conviction, for illegal dumping of hazardous waste in the state. The legislation also gives the attorney general power to seek extradition of violators from other states.

It is suspected that a hazardous waste hauler picked up the material from industries in the area and dumped it, IEPA officials said.

Meanwhile, additional soil and water samples near the creek are being collected by IEPA. Samples also are being taken south of Judith Lane where PCBs and metals were found.

ILLINOIS

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Sauget site investigated for toxic chemicals

By PATRICIA SZYMCAK
Globe-Democrat Staff Writer

SAUGET — Illinois authorities are investigating a Sauget site where they believe toxic chemicals from a landfill used as a dumping ground for industrial wastes for more than 40 years may endanger the ground water. The Globe-Democrat has learned.

Michael Mauzy, director of the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency, confirmed his agency is looking into reports that the late Leo Sauget, the first mayor of the town that bears his name, operated an immense landfill southeast of Dead Creek, which is a smoldering, glowing ditch polluted with cancer-causing chemicals and toxic metals.

"There's a better than 50-50 chance something's there," Mauzy told. The

Globe-Democrat. "We're taking it very seriously, but we're not going to stick an auger in it and chance hitting something."

EPA SCIENTISTS will release results of an analysis of water samples taken from private wells in the Cahokia end of Dead Creek at a news conference Wednesday.

But, while Mauzy said a favorable finding "will be good news for the private well users, it does not mean that (chemical pollutants) haven't gotten into the ground water."

"We'll be doing more tests later in the Sauget end," near where a 3-acre landfill reportedly was operated south of Queeny Avenue and west of Falling Springs Road from early in the century until the mid 1960s.

Reports of possible dumping of toxic waste at the site allegedly operated by

the former mayor of Monsanto (the town was renamed Sauget in 1968) surfaced following revelations that the dried up Dead Creek nearby contains high levels of cancer causing PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls), pesticides and 20 metals.

MAUZY TOLD THE Globe-Democrat the EPA does not know if the dump is the source of the Dead Creek pollution, or if it is a situation the agency will have to treat separately.

"We don't want to be alarmist because we don't know what's there," Mauzy said.

Ann Carr, assistant Illinois attorney general for pollution cases in the southern part of the state, said her office is watching the EPA investigation closely and is prepared to prosecute when the person responsible is found.

The attorney general's office has "a suspect" in the Dead Creek case, but as yet has not begun an investigation of the source of material in the nearby landfill, she said.

"We're talking about a time when people buried the stuff and I thought it would all go away," Mrs. Carr said, adding that industries that generated the waste products usually are sued if the dumper cannot be found or is unable to pay.

SOURCES CLOSE TO the EPA say the agency may have to use an electronic "treasure hunting" device to determine if large quantities of metal exist below the surface, because of fears that drilling in the area could release toxic wastes that might otherwise remain encased in 55-gallon drums.

EPA officials have no record of a

dump at the site, which was allegedly closed before the General Assembly passed laws requiring landfill operators to register with the state. The first rules governing such registration were passed in 1966 by the Illinois Department of Public Health and are now enforced by EPA.

But, Cahokia firefighters recall numerous blazes near the area in the 1950s and early 1960s that sometimes caused their department to be called to assist Sauget fire officials.

A retired assistant chief of the Cahokia fire department told The Globe-Democrat he responded to fires in a dump south of Queeny Avenue across from what is now the Sauget Village Hall, and once fought a blaze in Dead Creek itself.

"I COULDN'T SAY what it was (burning). But it was something out of

the ordinary," he said. "It was just a nasty hole. The fires were harder to control."

G. Thomas Duffy, a former managing editor of the now defunct Metro-East (East St. Louis) Journal, remembered stories of nearby residents who claimed to have gotten sick from odors wafting across the fields surrounding the landfill.

"There were a great number of objectors to it," Duffy said.

Mrs. Carr said her office has learned that more than one old landfill may exist in the Sauget area, but that report has yet to be confirmed.

Despite repeated efforts by The Globe-Democrat, Paul Sauget, who succeeded his father as mayor of the town, could not be reached for comment Monday.